

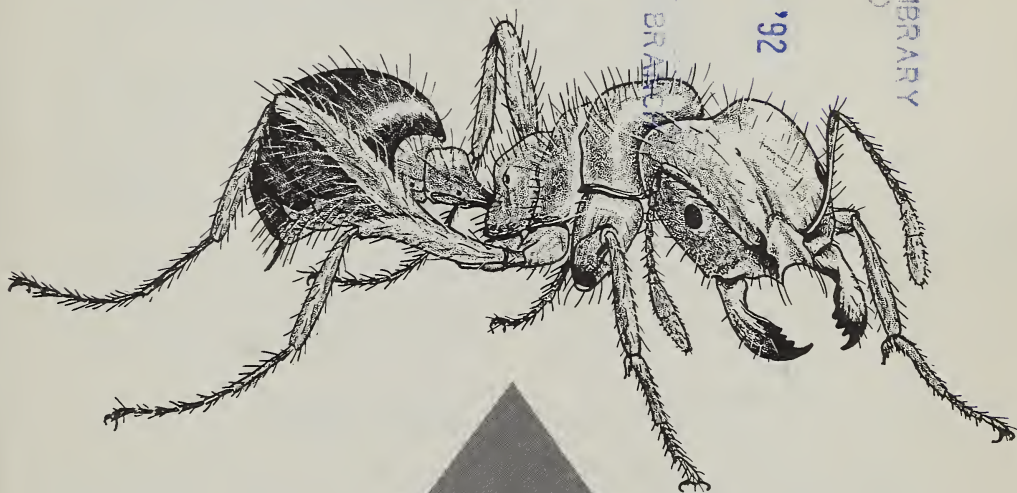
Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

Pro

Sta

The
Fight
Against ...



The
Imported
FIRE ANT

U.S. Department of Agriculture

PA-368

USDA
LIBRARY
DEC 22 '92
ACQ. SERIALS BRANCH



The imported fire ant, a serious pest of pastures, people, and crops in the South, is the target of a co-operative, Federal-State eradication program.

Although it resembles native species of fire ants, the imported fire ant is a vicious, aggressive creature.

When its mound is disturbed, the ant attacks by sinking powerful jaws into the skin, then repeatedly thrusting its poisonous stinger into the flesh. The stings cause long-lasting sores which sometimes leave scars. People allergic to the stings may need medical care.

ECONOMIC DAMAGE

Imported fire ants are destructive, costly, and a nuisance. However, major losses from this pest are reduced efficiency of labor and machinery—losses hard to assess in dollars.

Since ants prefer land exposed to the sun, some of the most valuable farming and pasture land is most heavily infested. Improved pastures and hay fields are especially hard hit.

Farmers lose valuable time during seeding, fertilizing, and harvesting of crops.

For example, a farmer mowing hay in a heavily-infested area runs the risk of (1) breaking expensive equipment on the hard-crusted mounds, and (2) getting stung when he tries to clear the machinery of the dirt and ants.

If he succeeds in mowing the hay and leaves it to dry in the field, the fire ants then begin building new mounds in the fallen hay. This delays harvesting, and hampers handling the hay.

Farmers also find it difficult to hire workers to go into fields inhabited by these fiery little pests.

DIRECT DAMAGE

Imported fire ants also do direct damage to some crops. They injure vegetable crops by sucking juices from the stems of plants and by gnawing holes in roots, stalks, buds, ears, and pods. They attack pasture grasses, cereal and forage crops, young corn, nursery stock, and fruit trees.

Farmers have reported fire ants attacking and killing newborn pigs, calves, sheep, and other animals; newly hatched chicks; and the young of ground-nesting birds.

OFF FARM LOSSES

The ants are not just a farm problem. Highway departments and railroad companies must contend with fire ant mounds on their rights-of-ways. Mounds in lawns, cemeteries, parks, playgrounds, school yards, golf courses and other recreation areas are eyesores and hamper the care of grounds and it isn't safe to let young children play around fire ant mounds.

ERADICATION PROGRAM

Although the imported fire ant has been in the United States since around 1920, it did not constitute a serious problem until several years ago when it had its own "population explosion."

In 1953, the pest was found in 100 counties in 10 States. By 1956, it had spread at an alarming rate. Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture were besieged by

farmers and homeowners seeking help in battling the invaders. Therefore, in 1957, Congress directed the Department to develop proposals and plans to eradicate the imported fire ant.

HOW THE PROGRAM OPERATES

Various phases of the imported fire ant program are coordinated by representatives of Federal and State Departments of Agriculture who work with local people in planning and conducting the eradication program. All work is done under the supervision of trained Federal and State pest control workers.

Cost of the program is shared by the Federal Government, States, counties, cities and individuals.

STEPS IN PROGRAM

Three coordinated steps to eradicate the ant now being carried out are: Surveys, Quarantines, and Treatment.



BN-8783X

Imported fire ant mounds dot this open field.



BN-15163X

Ants feeding on okra blossom.

THE SURVEY

Surveys are conducted to determine the outward limits of the generally infested area; and the extent and degree of infestations. Surveys are necessary because of the continually changing pattern of infestation.

THE QUARANTINE

Fire ants can be spread by movement of soil, sand, and gravel; plants with soil attached; hay and sod; wood, lumber, and other forest products.

Safe and effective treatments and methods of handling these materials have been developed. Regulatory treatments make it possible for industrial products to be moved without spreading the ants.

TREATMENT

Properly used insecticides can rid an area of imported fire ants. These insecticides are applied by aircraft, motorized ground machinery, and hand applicators.

Each area is studied to determine the proper method and timing for the application.

Aircraft are used to treat large, generally infested, open areas, and places not easily reached by other equipment.

Ground equipment, motorized and hand, is used to treat small blocks in easily accessible places or to re-treat occasional mounds that reappear where places are "missed" by the airplane swath.

Sometimes various combinations of aircraft and other methods are used.

Isolated infestations beyond the boundary of the generally infested areas are treated first to shrink the outer edge of the infestation.



BN-15453

Loading an airplane with insecticide.

INSECTICIDES USED

Insecticides used in the imported fire ant program are mixed with a special clay and applied in dry, granular form.

These granules sift readily through the foliage to the ground where the ants live. They do not stick to dry foliage, fruits, and berries that livestock and other animals eat.

Two treatments of one-quarter pound of heptachlor per acre are applied 90 to 120 days apart. Thousands of acres have been treated in this manner with no significant loss to beneficial wildlife populations.

Insecticides are applied according to well-developed plans and only where an immediate need exists.

SAFETY

Close Federal or State supervision of eradication activities is maintained at all times. When aircraft are used, the application is supervised from the air while ground crews mark the swath widths with special balloons. Radio communications coordinate operations.

YOU HAVE A STAKE

Yes, you have a stake in the imported fire ant eradication program.

If allowed to build up, the ants become numerous enough to lower

the value of your land, annoy and possibly injure members of your family and friends, reduce crop yields, and harm livestock and pets. They could eventually spread throughout the South and westward to the Pacific coast.

To help make the program work:

- Do not move soil from an infested to an uninfested area unless it has been treated.
- Consult your local plant pest control inspector before you move soil, stump wood or plants from infested areas.
- Report imported fire ant infestations to your county agricultural agent or State entomologist as soon as you spot them.
- When a program that includes your property has been set up, cooperate with officials and follow all the protective measures adopted by Federal and State Governments.

The success of this program depends upon your support.

CONTROL

USDA Leaflet 350, The Imported Fire Ant: How To Control It, describes the development, appearance, and the habits of the imported fire ant and gives recommendations for controlling it.



Growth Through Agricultural Progress

Prepared by
Plant Pest Control Division
Agricultural Research Service

Washington, D.C.

Revised July 1962

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1962 O - 633359

